



Meeting with  
Bosnian officials.

55° Signal Company (Alfredo Barraza, Jr.)

# Today It's *Gold*, Not *Purple*

By SCOTT W. MOORE

**J**ointness—the *purple* paradigm—although a work in progress is outdated and insufficient. Contemporary civil-military operations require a smarter, more complementary approach to global turmoil. Terrorism, counternarcotics operations, peacekeeping missions, sub-state threats, and counterproliferation exceed the capabilities of any one Federal agency.

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This suggests the need to look at the increasingly vital, albeit extremely difficult, realm of interagency—or *gold*—operations.

To date this potential force multiplier and source of operational problems has been treated casually. The literature reflects the requirement for viable interagency organizations and processes but does not detail how to enable unified cross-agency operations. This article examines the 1980–92 counterinsurgency in El Salvador to highlight factors which determined its outcome, focusing especially on interaction between the U.S. Military

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Group (MILGP) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Since the end of the Cold War there has been much discussion about the most likely threats in the future and how they impact on force structure, doctrine, and changing paradigms. Although there are few certainties that policymakers can use to predict the future, most would agree on one point: jointness is a military mindset that for whatever reason appeals to civilian and military leaders. While the joint train has already left the station, it will take years for the Armed Forces to institutionalize and comprehensively apply joint doctrine.

### A New Paradigm

Genuine jointness has yet to arrive and recolor military organizations and operations. That is good, since purple is no longer in vogue. Today interagency teams are upstaging joint teams as the preferred instruments in times of crisis. Just as purple signifies jointness today, gold may be the hue of collective undertakings tomorrow.

Interagency operations have been crucial in El Salvador, Panama, Haiti, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia. Yet the professional interest in and doctrine for such complicated endeavors is underdeveloped. If joint operations are a challenge, interagency operations are even harder. Thus the latter tend to be primarily personality-driven and are conducted on an ad hoc basis. Where the stakes are high the United States cannot afford to respond haphazardly. After a number of

wake-up calls for the Armed Forces, interagency operations are here to stay. Any organization involved in projecting national power need to fully recognize and support them. Without institutionalizing an interagency bias, too much unity of effort will be sacrificed until workarounds eventually emerge. Military organizations especially must change to accommodate time-critical interagency operations such as counterterrorist and counterproliferation responses.<sup>1</sup>

### The Vietnam Experience

Modern counterinsurgency doctrine (an interagency effort requiring coordinated reforms in the political, social, economic, and security environment) emerged in the 1960s. President Lyndon Johnson, frustrated by the disunity of operations in Vietnam, directed the establishment of a civil-military program known as Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). He wanted an interagency approach that encouraged "a better military program, a better pacification program that includes everything,

and a better peace program." And until CORDS was formed in 1967, as one historian has recounted, "many Americans involved in South Vietnam, depending on their outlook or on which government agency they worked for, saw pacification as either civil or military but not as a joint civil-military process."<sup>2</sup> Such a procedure was precisely what CORDS embodied, with civilian members exercising control over the military who were in the majority.

"CORDS represented not so much a military takeover of pacification as the formation of an ad hoc civil-military hybrid."<sup>3</sup> It was responsible for establishing and implementing all plans and operations in support of pacification, to include providing advice and training for paramilitary units that furnished local security in urban areas and the countryside. In the end, despite some progress in pacification, the program was ill matched to the organizational philosophy of the military.

There is an ongoing debate about whether CORDS would have achieved more under other circumstances and which parts of the concept were most viable. Certainly it encountered stiff resistance from the communists, but the greatest impediment to success was the pervasive distrust of interagency operations manifest in bureaucratic politics, civil-military rivalries, and unrealistic expectations. No one left Vietnam unscathed. And because the United States did not win the war, the military tended to blame civilians for the outcome while the civilians blamed the military.

Joint Publication 3-08, *Interagency Coordination During Joint Operations*, acknowledged that interagency disunity existed: "The Vietnam conflict was often fraught with inefficiency among the myriad of U.S. Government agencies [that] operated independently, without much interagency coordination, and each was satisfied that its individual interests were being met. The consequence was a seemingly incoherent war effort." Agencies blamed one another for failures and setbacks. Distrust, skepticism, and finger pointing persisted. Counterinsurgency operations involve winning the hearts and minds of the people, which is a multiagency undertaking.

Shortly after the Vietnam War the United States embarked on a small interagency operation conducted by MILGP and USAID in El Salvador. At first blush it appeared chances were slim that two such dissimilar organizations could work as a team. Counterinsurgency theory called for a concerted multiagency effort against the guerrillas while organization theory indicated that the odds were against interagency cooperation and civil-military biases erected further barriers. Yet despite

**counterinsurgency operations involve winning hearts and minds, which is a multiagency undertaking**



Civil-military interaction during training exercise.

13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (Don L. Maass)

### hippies (USAID workers) and snake eaters (SOF) will increasingly find themselves working together

the overwhelming odds and a disjointed bureaucratic mechanism to deal with a complex problem, unity of effort improved in the latter stages of the war. Why did coordination increase between MILGP and USAID, and can it be achieved in interagency operations today? Examination of the interaction between these influential but dissimilar organizations indicates that their ability to realize their goals was ultimately a function of leadership, trust, shared experiences, and the nature of the conflict itself.

#### Applying the Theory

Interagency initiatives offer little incentive for dissimilar agencies to cooperate, especially if cooperation endangers their institutional roles or interests. Organizations are essentially concerned with survival. In interagency operations, turf delineation becomes less certain and inefficiencies abound as bureaucracies under siege depend upon standard operating procedures to the detriment of the larger effort. The problem is compounded when organizations attack problems from their respective cultures, civilian versus military. The success in El Salvador largely focused on distinct agencies blending elements of national power. In an era of fiscal constraint there is also pressure to synchronize assets for maximum impact. As one analysis has indicated, "If the United States is to enjoy a measure of order and stability in the conduct of world affairs, this synergism must be routine, must occur across the spectrum of relations, and must be applied with vision. . . ."<sup>4</sup> This is the interagency challenge. Lessons can be drawn from

the synergism of MILGP and USAID in El Salvador—two agencies that frequently work side by side around the world.

Teamwork is necessary to mount coherent counterinsurgency campaigns involving multiple agencies. Efforts to make orchestrated changes in the political, social, economic, and military arenas involve coordination, trust, and mutual support. Organization theory suggests that therein lies the dilemma. Success requires agencies to put aside differences and work toward a common good, but organizations see competition as survival of the fittest. Cooperating can disrupt the status quo, surrender hard-earned turf, or endanger organizational culture for intangible returns and more uncertainty. Job security and organizational performance are measured, justified, and evaluated on the basis of short-term egocentric norms, providing little incentive to cooperate with outside agencies regardless of magnanimous cross-agency rhetoric. Interagency coordination does make sense, but organization theory regards it as a pipe dream. That said, hippies (USAID workers) and snake-eaters (Special Operations Forces) will increasingly find themselves working together.

#### El Salvador

The prudent military agency will carry the interagency torch. The Salvadoran dilemma constitutes a recent interagency enterprise that warrants scrutiny with an eye towards institutionalizing those interagency imperatives that can improve contemporary operations.

In 1980 the problem of drawing a line against communist aggression in El Salvador was familiar though far from simple.<sup>5</sup> Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) insurgents (12,000 Salvadoran Marxist rebels allied to Cuba, Vietnam, and Nicaragua) garnered support from various groups with legitimate grievances.<sup>6</sup> They posed a threat to the 17,000 poorly trained and equipped troops of the ruling oligarchy. Most Salvadorans distrusted the regime because of the unaccountability of the military and violations of democratic processes. President Ronald Reagan sent a limited number of soldiers (primarily Special Forces), humanitarian workers, and diplomats to help quell the rebellion. The ad hoc team quickly discovered how fractured Salvadoran society really was as it applied counterinsurgency doctrine—an interagency undertaking under the rubric of foreign internal defense<sup>7</sup>—to a complicated and brutal civil war.<sup>8</sup>

For some time U.S./Salvadoran interagency responses were plagued by disharmony. One explanation of this failure was differing personalities and cultures. A retired American officer argued that "interagency coordination was very much personality-driven insofar as there was that



natural chasm between people who saw themselves as action guys and casual heroes (Salvadoran description of Special Forces) and [USAID] development guys who delivered the goods and really were concerned with the infrastructure and making programs work." Another explanation relates senior level intervention and emphasis. The director of the USAID special assistance program felt that "the only reason [his program] had any clout was [the support of] the ambassador. We had the support of USAID, but colleagues at the time saw us as CIA or counterinsurgency. We had a lot of criticisms internally. Some of that prejudice still exists." As an ex-MILGP commander has observed, interagency coordination "as it applied to [foreign internal defense] was not initially well developed. That was not because of a conscious decision on anybody's part not to [cooperate] but . . . a function of the fact that we were both decisively engaged with what we perceived to be our own areas of interest."

Counterinsurgency demands cooperation to win hearts and minds, yet organization theory explains why cooperation is so hard to achieve, and civil-military relations literature suggests that one should cube the degree of difficulty when disparate cultures hold hands. To take civil-military prejudices to an extreme—the military is viewed as killing and destroying to achieve its ends while civilians negotiate and toss money at a problem in order to keep it away from America's doorstep. In fact, interagency operations that are time-sensitive and require deliberate planning and execution as well as use of deadly force are usually performed best by the military. Few civilian agencies have the assets or skills to accomplish them.

Military operations require accountable and engaged leadership, established procedures and chains of command, and heavy stress on training and performance standards. The Armed Forces are believed to see the world in black or white while civilians argue about shades of gray. Civilian-run operations are less rigid in terms of leadership, interchangeability, and command and control. Civil authorities are more tolerant of individuality, disunity, and inefficiency, the characteristics of a democracy where civilians run the show. But the demands of postwar reconciliation, democratic palatability, widespread appeal, and overall effectiveness demonstrate that neither civilian agencies nor military organizations can succeed without the other. The equation is complicated in coalitions, where members of multinational forces act out their own civil-military concepts. The Salvadoran dilemma called for a cooperative process and an interagency response that defied the principles of organizational behavior and customary civil-military relations.

## Reviewing the Literature

Interagency operations include El Salvador, Panama, Kuwait, Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. In Somalia 78 private organizations contributed relief support while over a hundred assisted with U.N. relief in Rwanda. Some 350 organizations are registered with USAID. While they represent a common *modus operandi* in today's world, literature on the interagency process is scant.<sup>9</sup> There has been little serious analysis of how to overcome the practical impediments.

The paucity of literature leaves the practitioner to develop causal determinants of success. Joint Pub 3-08 outlines the interagency process and participants and explains the evolving role of the military. Although it reaffirms the importance of coordination and unity of effort it leaves room for others to determine the important variables. The process recognizes the need for increasingly task-unified forces.

A synergistic interagency response is only part of the solution. The impediments to unified effort must be recognized, understood, and overcome if the response is to be greater than the sum of its parts. Cooperation—much less integration of competing efforts—is difficult but vital. Joint Pub 3-08, the latest publication that could have spelled out interagency imperatives, simply passes the buck: "Additionally, there is no overarching interagency doctrine that delineates or dictates the relationships and procedures governing all agencies, departments, and interagency operations. Nor is there an overseeing organization to ensure that the myriad agencies . . . have the capability and tools to work together." Taken as a whole, the literature acknowledges the inherent difficulties in the process but suggests that the answer can be found in improved operating mechanisms rather than personal training and relationships. But if interagency groups rest on their core competencies at the working level the emphasis belongs there.

## Findings

The Salvadoran case study supports the contention that senior intervention in the form of clear guidance, persistent emphasis, and continual support is prerequisite to interagency unity. For without the ardent backing of the ambassador, MILGP commander, and USAID director, extended disarray would have been the rule of the day as the two organizations remained in their respective lanes. Viewed from outside, the need to get senior leadership on board to support the interagency



U.S. and Salvadoran soldiers.



U.S. Special Operations Command

Providing security for Assured Lift, West Africa.

1<sup>st</sup> Combat Camera Squadron (Paul R. Caron)

**mutual trust, shared stakes, and experience are important determinants for improving the interagency process**

initiatives was a foregone conclusion, given the frustration at working level in each agency.

Improved coordination is another requirement. Mutual trust, shared stakes, and experience are important determinants for improving the interagency process.

Trust in individuals translates into trust in their agencies. The more people work together, the more confidence they gain in each other, and the greater their efforts to maintain bonds and reputations.

In turn, shared experiences build working relationships that underpin subsequent initiatives. Track records are also important, as are personal and organizational interests. These levels of

trust, first with regard to people then to organizations, were key determinants of unity.

Research has shown that variables played different roles during the three stages of this war. Stage I was the period before 1983 and the development of any national strategy or campaign plan. Stage II continued until 1987 when the *Municipios en Acción* (MEA) program started and FMLN turned to economic sabotage, and peace initiatives began. Stage III was the last part of the conflict, ending when the peace accords were signed in 1992.

Of the variables—trust, stakes, and experience—trust and shared experience contributed to coordination while stakes had little impact. During stage II the stakes went up (as did interagency coordination) as each party responded to pressure from Washington. When the stakes went down as it became evident that the guerrillas could not win, interagency coordination did not degenerate.

Scant resources and the irregularity of the conflict can be correlated with improvements in interagency support. Restricting the number of advisers as well as types and amounts of military hardware, and linking aid to human rights, complicated the activities of U.S. organizations, each of which would realize that mutual support was necessary before their individual goals could be met. Congress kept a tight rein on operations, which eventually drove each agency to develop techniques to alleviate shortfalls.

Did additional funding help or hurt interagency coordination? The more eyes that watched spending, the less flexible the bureaucracy became. However, since USAID had most of the funds for the counterinsurgency effort, Special Forces teams necessarily coordinated with—and solicited support from—USAID project managers. Despite the risk of graft, interagency coordination at the worker level resulted in an effective allocation, distributing cash directly to rural mayors under the auspices of the MEA program. Mutual support required routine information sharing.

As the nature of the conflict changed from a war of attrition to a competition for hearts and minds the demand for mutual support grew. Resources became less constrained during stage II, yet support still improved. Then, when resources were again scarce during stage III, the degree of interagency cooperation remained about the same.

The MILGP commander during stage I was frustrated when Congress fixed the number of advisory personnel at a seemingly nonsensical level of 55. Later he agreed that smaller is better in unconventional warfare.<sup>10</sup> But is that the American way? The initial plan in 1979 included 55 trainers, to be expanded to 250 as the crisis developed, although the original number proved nonnegotiable. Presumably that total seemed only a partial solution, but disunity flourished as more people entered the fray, which supports the contention that limiting personnel is preferable in interagency efforts.

### The Road Ahead

There are four recommendations that flow from this analysis: hold interagency exercises, invest in the people who conduct them, educate leaders, and develop interagency organizations.

First, exercises educate leaders as well as practitioners. It is not enough to practice joint operations. Interagency scenarios are more probable and difficult. Realistic multiagency exercises encourage combined civil-military courses of action and provide shared experiences which can develop trust and understanding.

Second, people achieve interagency unity. If people matter most, invest in them. Problem solving requires education, training, initiative, and

practice. Regional expertise involves more than language skills; it takes experience. As part of that investment, cross-cultural communication must be carefully honed. Personnel must know their counterparts in other agencies, develop trust, and shape conditions for mission success by living, training, and working together. The alienation of civilian agencies from military organizations must end. The fusion needed to create interagency teams must be proactive and deliberate, not ad hoc. This is a prerequisite for the modern warrior-diplomats who comprise Special Operations Forces.

Third, leaders who establish and guide interagency teams must be educated. Policymakers, diplomats, commanders, and planners can greatly influence how U.S. interests are conveyed, translated, and implemented. They must appreciate how agencies of the Departments of State and Defense will respond to their guidance. When Americans jeopardize their lives for poorly-defined objectives or improperly diagnosed problems, politics can be lethal. Fewer civilian leaders have military experience today. Consequently, they may view the military, especially special operators, as incapable of handling problems which require diplomacy and tact. There must thus be deliberate efforts to develop mutual confidence.

Fourth, if the interagency approach is best but is complicated by organizational pressures, why not create interagency organizations? Policymakers must institutionalize the process at the highest levels. Joint operations are simple compared to the disparate interagency combinations involved in contemporary civil-military operations. Civilians and the military will have to work side by side. Turf delineation will become less certain. The equation is further complicated when the context is global and other countries act in accordance with their own versions of civil-military relations. Until the concept of optimizing is redefined to include postwar reconciliation earlier in the process, interagency operations will be sub-optimized by dated beliefs about democratic civil-military relations.

Gold should become the color of the new paradigm for an interagency approach to complex problems. If a country team can make it happen at the local level, why not have similar organizations at regional and national levels?<sup>11</sup> Enhancing interagency entities is essential to implement solutions to complex problems. Today counterterrorism responses are the result of a convoluted and ad hoc process which relies on innate human reactions. Is this what we really want or is it what we have settled for instead of making hard decisions and introducing real changes? **JFQ**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Tucker describes the evolution of U.S. counterterrorism organization and the predominantly ad hoc interagency responses in *Skirmishes at the Edge of Empire: The United States and International Terrorism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support* (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 217–18.

<sup>4</sup> George T. Raach and Ilana Kass, "National Power and the Interagency Process," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 8 (Summer 1995), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> See William M. LeoGrande, "A Splendid Little War: Drawing the Line in El Salvador," *Revolution in Central America*, edited by John Althoff (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building* (Santa Monica, Calif.: National Defense Research Institute, 1991), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Joint Pub 3-07.1, *JTTP for Foreign Internal Defense*, defines foreign internal defense as "participation by the civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the active programs taken by another government to protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency." This broad definition frames a messy foreign assistance arena that is a veritable minefield.

<sup>8</sup> American strategists considered El Salvador an ideal testing ground for learning how to fight small wars. See A.J. Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador* (Washington: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Useful sources on this subject include Thomas W. Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*; Paul David Miller, "The Interagency Process: Engaging America's Full National Security Capabilities," national security paper 11 (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1993); Margaret Daly Hayes and Gary F. Wheatley, *Interagency and Political-Military Dimensions of Peace Operations: Haiti—A Case Study* (Washington: National Defense University, 1996); William W. Mendel and David G. Bradford, *Interagency Cooperation: A Regional Model for Overseas Operations* (Washington: National Defense University, 1995); and George T. Raach and Ilana Kass, "National Power and the Interagency Process."

<sup>10</sup> John D. Waghelstein, "Ruminations of a Pachyderm or What I Learned in the Counterinsurgency Business," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 5 (London: Frank Cass, 1994), p. 361.

<sup>11</sup> On establishment of coordinating organizations, see especially Thomas Gibbings et al., "Interagency Operations Centers: An Opportunity We Can't Ignore," *Parameters*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Winter 1998–99), pp. 99–112.